

MT National Guard Goes Sky-High to Help Communications

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A new project will bring communications for both Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana National Guard into the 21st century.

Nearly 25 contracted workers are installing four microwaves and an antenna tower on the top of the Baldy Mountain in the Highwood range to improve communications in cases of disaster, emergency and military trainings.

The project wouldn't be possible without the Guard and its CH-47 Chinook helicopter, which can airlift up to 20,000 pounds of equipment at a time. Because of the rough terrain on the mountain top, the helicopter cannot land, so equipment must be airlifted.

What challenges does an airlift mission present compared to a regular mission?

Jack McMullen, a contracted network engineer, said, "A lot of coordination and effort from everyone concerned. That's what it takes."

Local law enforcement, as well as the Montana Highway Patrol, are just a couple of the many agencies that will benefit from these microwaves.

Dave Cunningham, Lewis & Clark National Forest Public Affairs Officer, explained, "When you have an incident, whether it be a wildfire event or natural or man-made disaster, you often have multiple agencies and jurisdictions responding to come to the aid of people. Communications are imperative for the success of that mission and this is another tool in our tool box."

Charity Watt-Levis, of the Montana Department of Transportation, agreed: "This will allow us the centralized ability to communicate directly from headquarters to our field."

Second Lieutenant Dan Bushnell, Montana National Guard Public Affairs Officer, said, "We require constant communication with our aircrafts that fly across the state of Montana, both for training needs and in times of state disaster."

The \$1.9-million dollar project is funded by Air Force Space Command and is expected to wrap up by October.

The mission is part of a larger \$20-million dollar project to increase communication capabilities between Air Force bases in Wyoming, North Dakota, and Montana.



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